#### FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

#### INSTALLATION, OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF A REMOTE VIDE SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS NEAR YSELTA (EL PASO COUNTY), TEXAS

The primary purpose of the proposed action is to assist in fulfilling the U.S. Border Patrol's (USBP) mission to reduce illegal immigration and drug trafficking along the border by increasing their ability to detect, deter and apprehend Illegal entrants. The proposed action would include installation, maintenance and operation of a remote video surveillance system (RVS) near Yselta (El Paso County), Texas.

The RVS would be mounted on top of a steel pole (approximately 80 feet high) and would consist of low-light and/or infrared cameras and transmitters. The general location of the RVS site was determined based upon the known presence of illegal entry and activities, amount of time normally required to respond to the area, and the juxtaposition with extant systems to ensure that optimum surveillance capabilities would be provided. The specific location was selected based upon proximity to existing roads and power sources, ability to obtain lease or right-of-entry, and topography. No alternative locations were assessed.

A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) was prepared in 1994 for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and JTF-6 to address similar proposed projects and missions along the southwestern border of the U.S. The EA for the proposed action is tiered from that PEIS in accordance with the President's Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

No significant adverse affects to the natural or human environment are expected upon implementation of the proposed action. In addition, no adverse effects to cultural resources or Federally protected threatened/endangered species or habitats are expected. Based upon the results of the EA and the environmental design measures to be incorporated as part of the proposed action, it has been concluded that the proposed action will not have a significant adverse effect on the environment.

Richard J. Diefenbeck

Director, Office of Administration

Headquarters Facilities and Engineering Division

Date

9/14/00

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR A

## PROPOSED REMOTE VIDEO SURVEILLANCE (RVS) SITE AT YSELTA, TEXAS

## U.S. IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

## SEPTEMBER 2000

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#### **ABSTRACT**

PROPOSED ACTION:

The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) proposes to install and operate, a Remote Video Surveillance (RVS) tower and system near the U.S. – Mexico border near Ysleta, Texas.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION:

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide enhanced electronic, RVS capabilities for the USBP. The RVS components would facilitate the detection of illegal drug traffickers and undocumented aliens without increasing the number of field agents in the field.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION:

The No Action Alternative would preclude the installation of the pole and RVS system, which would further reduce the efficiency and success of the USBP's efforts in counterdrug and alien interdictions.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

The proposed action would involve minimal construction activities within a site that has been previously disturbed. The site was surveyed for sensitive biological and cultural resources. No significant adverse effects to air quality, water quality, cultural resource, wetlands, protected species, or land use are expected.

**CONCLUSIONS:** 

Based on the findings of this analysis, no significant adverse impacts would occur from the proposed actions at the seven proposed RVS site locations. Increased or enhanced interdiction of illegal drug and alien entry and activities would have positive, indirect socioeconomic benefits. Therefore, no further analysis or documentation (Environmental Impact Statement) is warranted. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, in implementing this decision, will employ all practical means to minimize the potential adverse impacts on the local environment.

Richard J. Diefenbeck, Director Headquarters, Facilities and Engineering Division U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service

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#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

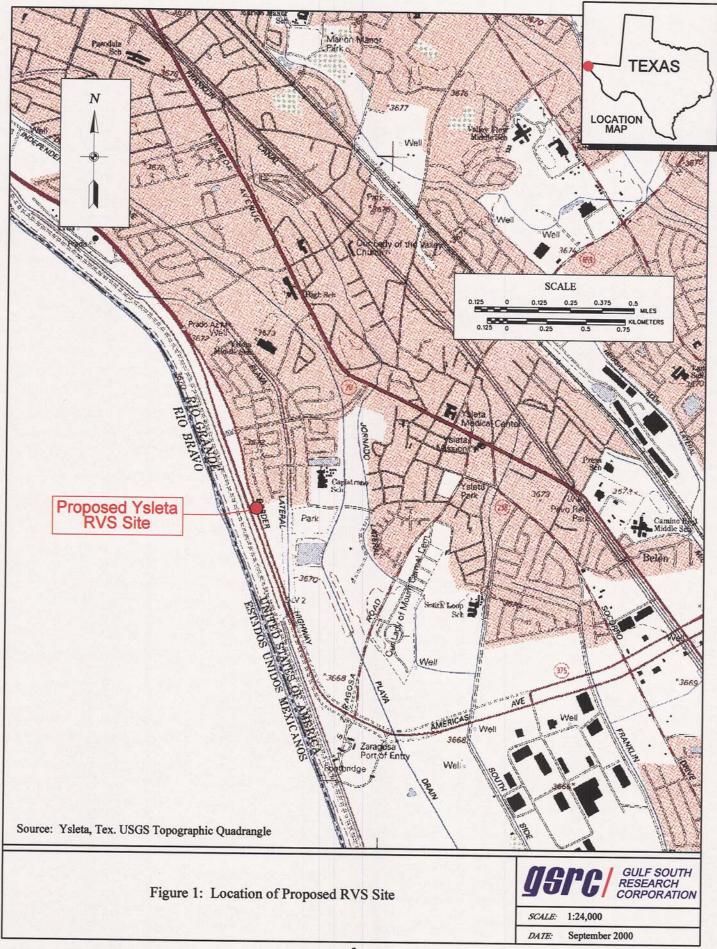
### 1.1 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide enhanced electronic, remote video surveillance (RVS) capabilities for the U. S. Border Patrol (USBP), El Paso Station. The RVS is part of an overall Integrated Surveillance and Intelligence System (ISIS) that the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is developing along the United States borders. The RVS components would facilitate the detection of illegal drug traffickers and undocumented aliens without increasing the number of agents in the field. This additional surveillance capability would also allow the USBP to more effectively control a larger area and improve enforcement and apprehension response time. This document is tiered from the 1994 Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE]1994) that addressed INS and Joint Task Force-Six (JTF-6) activities along the U.S.-Mexico Border.

#### 2.0 ALTERNATIVES

#### 2.1 Selected Alternative

The USBP proposes to install, operate and maintain a pole-mounted RVS systems near Yselta, Texas (Figure 1). The proposed action would include a pole equipped with a camera and transmitter to send the signals back to the El Paso USBP Station. This equipment would be mounted approximately 60 feet above ground level on a concrete or steel pole that is approximately three feet in diameter. A concrete pad (approximately ten feet square) would be poured at the site, to anchor the pole in the ground. Power to the pole would be supplied via aerial lines from adjacent grids.



#### 2.2 "No Action" Alternative

The No Action Alternative would prevent the installation and operation of the surveillance system. Under this alternative, illegal traffickers and undocumented aliens would be less likely to be detected and, thus, apprehended; additional agents would have to be deployed to the region; or the current staff would be required to work longer hours. The latter two scenarios would require significant additional funding and authorization from Congress.

#### 2.3 Alternatives Considered

The general location of the RVS site was determined based upon the known presence of illegal entry and activities, amount of time normally required to respond to the area, and the juxtaposition with extant systems to ensure that optimum surveillance capabilities would be provided. Site specific locations were selected based upon proximity to existing roads and power sources, ability to obtain lease or right-of-entry, and topography. Because this site best fits the above criteria, no alternative locations were assessed.

#### 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

As indicated by Figure 1, the site of the proposed pole location, an area of approximately 10 feet by 10 feet adjacent to an existing roadway will be the proposed site. The site is located along the Border Highway, approximately one mile north of the Zaragosa Port of Entry (POE).

#### 3.1 Land Use

Land use at the proposed project site is currently undeveloped and is part of the Texas Department of Transportation's right-of-way (ROW) for Highway 375, Border Highway. The land adjacent to the proposed site is urban residential to the northeast, agricultural to the southeast and the Mexico border to the west.

#### 3.2 Air Quality

The Clean Air Act, which was last amended in 1990, requires the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to set National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for pollutants considered harmful to public health and the environment. The Act established two types of national air quality standards. Primary standards set limits to protect the public health, including the health of sensitive populations such as asthmatics, children, and the elderly. Secondary standards set limits to protect public welfare, including protection against decreased visibility, damage to animals, crops, vegetation, and buildings (EPA 1998). The EPA Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards (OAQPS) has set NAAQS for six criteria pollutants (Table 2). Areas where air pollution levels persistently exceed the NAAQS may be designated non-attainment. El Paso County is located within the EPA's Region 6 and is currently in non-attainment with established national and state air quality standards for carbon monoxide (moderate), ozone (serious), and PM<sub>10</sub> (moderate) (EPA 2000).

#### 3.3 Water Quality

The Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission (TNRCC) Surface Water Quality Monitoring Program (SWQMP) recognizes the geologic and hydrologic diversity of the state by dividing major river basins, reservoirs, bays, and estuaries into defined segments (referred to as classified segments). In Texas, segment-specific desirable uses (fully, partially, or non-supporting) are assigned by the TNRCC and numerical water quality criteria are derived to ensure protection for some of the assigned uses. The Texas Water Quality standards (TAC 301.2-307.10) contain general standards that apply to all surface waters in the state, and segment-specific standards which identify appropriate uses (aquatic life, contact or non-contact recreation, drinking water, etc.) and designate upper and lower limits for common indicators (criteria) of water quality, such as dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, dissolved minerals, and fecal coliform bacteria. The standards also establish criteria and control procedures for specific toxic substances and total toxicity. Specific numerical criteria for the protection of aquatic life from 39 toxic materials and protection of human health from 64 toxic materials are listed in the Texas standards as well as an anti-degradation policy (TNRCC 1996).

Due to the small area of impact associated with the proposed project (10 square ft), no significant impacts are foreseen in the project area.

Table 1
National Ambient Air Quality Standards

POLLUTANT	STANDARD VALUE	STANDARD TYPE
Carbon Monoxide (CO)		
8-hour average	9ppm (10mg/m <sup>3</sup> )** 35ppm (40mg/m <sup>3</sup> )**	Primary
1-hour average	35ppm (40mg/m <sup>3</sup> )**	Primary
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO <sub>2</sub> )		
Annual arithmetic mean	$0.053$ ppm $(100\mu g/m^3)**$	Primary and Secondary
Ozone (O <sub>3</sub> )		
l-hour average*	0.12ppm (235μg/m <sup>3</sup> )**	Primary and Secondary
8-hour average*	$0.08$ ppm $(157\mu g/m^3)**$	Primary and Secondary
Lead (Pb)		
Quarterly average	$1.5 \mu g/m^3$	Primary and Secondary
Particulate<10 micrometers (PM-10)		
Annual arithmetic mean	50μg/m <sup>3</sup>	Primary and Secondary
24-hour average	$150 \mu g/m^3$	Primary and Secondary
Particulate<2.5 micrometers (PM-2.5)		
Annual arithmetic mean	15μg/m <sup>3</sup>	Primary and Secondary
Sulfur Dioxide (SO <sub>2</sub> )		
Annual average mean	$0.03$ ppm $(80\mu g/m^3)**$	Primary
24-hour average	$0.14$ ppm $(365\mu g/m^3)**$	Primary
3-hour average	0.50ppm (1300μg/m <sup>3</sup> )**	Secondary

Source: Environmental Protection Agency, Aerometric Information Retrieval System, 1998.

Legend:

ppm = parts per million mg/m<sup>3</sup> = milligrams per cubic meter of air

 $\mu g/m^3 = micrograms$  per cubic meter of air

- \* The ozone 1-hour standard applies only to areas that were designated nonattainment when the ozone 8-hour standard was adopted in July 1997.
- \*\* Parenthetical value is an approximate equivalent concentration.

#### 3.4 Natural Resources

The proposed project site is located within the Trans-Pecos Mountains and Basins
Province of Texas. The soils are loamy or clayey, with some sandy soils with loamy
subsoils of indurated to powdery lime accumulations. Vegetation associations inherent to
the proposed site include bermuda grass and bare ground with scattered rocks.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) currently lists five protected species with the potential of occurring in El Paso County. These species are listed in the table below:

Table 2
List of Federal and State Protected Species

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	STATUS
Plants		
Sneed pincushion cactus	Coryphantha sneedii var. sneedii	E
Birds		
Interior least tern	Sterna antillarum	Е
Northern aplomado falcon	Falco femoralis septentrionalis	E
Mexican spotted owl	Strix occidentalis lucida	T
Southwestern willow flycatcher	Empidonax traillii extimus	E

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2000. Southwest Region Species List for El Paso County, Texas.

#### 3.5 Cultural Resources

Cultural resources investigations were conducted on September 5, 2000. Ground disturbance would be limited to a 10 ft x 10 ft section within the Texas Department of Transportation ROW for Highway 375. Because there was a high probability for both prehistoric and historic archaeological sites to be found in this area, an extensive surface survey for cultural materials was conducted. The Texas Archaelogical Research Laboratory in Austin was also contacted to identify any archaeological sites or properties considered by the National Register of Historic Places. Four sites, 41EP39, 41EP1725, 41EP2840, and 41EP5312 are recorded within a mile of the project area. None of these sites are in the area of potential impact.

With no proposed significant amounts of ground disturbance, and ground surface having better than seventy-five percent surface visibility, intensive surface survey was deemed sufficient for these investigations. During these investigations, no cultural resources were encountered. Disturbance to the area was noted from the construction of Highway 375 to the west and the residential neighborhood and wall to the north.

#### 3.6 Socioeceonomics

El Paso County is part of the El Paso Metropolitan area. The 1997 population of El Paso County was 701, 576, which ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in the state of Texas. This was an 18.6 percent change over the 1990 population of 591,610.

The racial mix of the El Paso County is mainly comprised of Caucasians (94%) and African-Americans (4%). The remaining 2% is split among Asian and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and other races. The majority of the total population (74%) claim to be of Hispanic origin (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998)

The 1997 annual total personal income (TPI) for El Paso County was \$10,503,793 (in thousands of dollars). This TPI ranked seventh in the state of Texas and accounted for 2.3% of the state total (Regional Economic Information System 2000). This was an increase over the 1987 TPI of \$5,517,248. Over the past ten years the average annual growth rate of TPI was 6.7%. This was slightly than the annual growth rate for the state of 6.8% and higher than that for the nation of 5.8%. Per capita personal income (PCPI) for El Paso County was \$15,216 in 1997. This PCPI ranked 224<sup>th</sup> in the state, and was 64% of the state average, \$23,707, and 64 % of the national average, \$25,288. This represents an increase over the 1987 PCPI of \$9,861. The average annual growth rate of PCPI over the past 10 years was 4.4%, which was lower than the state's growth rate of 5.2% and the national growth rate of 4.7%. The estimated number of people of all ages in poverty for El Paso County was 211,593. This represented 31% of the County, which is higher than the estimated 19% of the state population that lives in poverty. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998). The employment rate for El Paso County in 1997 was an estimated 11.2%.

#### 4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

#### 4.1 Construction Effects

The construction of the RVS site would include a pole equipped with a camera and transmitter to send the signals back to the El Paso USBP Station. This equipment would

be mounted approximately 60 feet above ground level on a concrete or steel pole that is approximately three feet in diameter. A post hole approximately four feet in diameter will need to be dug to place the pole. A concrete pad (approximately 10 feet square) would be poured at the site, to anchor the pole in the ground. Power to the pole would be supplied via aerial lines from adjacent grids.

#### 4.1.1 Land Use

Construction of the proposed RVS site would disturb approximately 10 square feet, which includes but is not limited to minor clearing and pouring a concrete foundation to install the pole. As stated before, this RVS site is located within the Texas Department of Transportation ROW, and has been highly disturbed by vehicle traffic, grading, and construction of a nearby residential area. Consequently, no land use changes would occur.

#### 4.1.2 Air Quality

El Paso County is located within EPA's Region 6 and is currently in non-attainment with established national and state air quality standards for carbon monoxide, ozone, and PM<sub>10</sub> (EPA 2000). Construction activities would be limited to pouring concrete foundations and anchors and the erection of the pole for the proposed RVS site. In view of the short duration of these activities, the type of equipment used, and the good dispersion patterns of the region, air emissions would be *de minimus* and would not jeopardize the attainment status of El Paso County.

#### 4.1.3 Water Quality

Due to the short duration of the construction activities involved, only minor soil erosion may result. The small loss of vegetation, and erosion would not likely affect water quality in the immediate or general area.

#### 4.1.4 Natural Resources

No Federal or state listed species were observed at the proposed project site. Due to the disturbed nature of the site, and the lack of native habitat, no impacts to listed species would be expected to occur during or following proposed actions.

#### 4.1.5 Cultural Resources

Aside from modern debris associated with the residential area to the north and highway 375 to the west, no cultural materials were encountered during this survey. The absence of these materials and the relatively disturbed context of the area suggests no impacts to cultural resources during construction of the new RVS site. However, the possibility of buried deposits should not be ignored. If any of these resources should be encountered during construction, the Texas Historical Commission, located in Austin, should be informed immediately.

#### 4.1.6 Hazardous Materials

No hazardous materials or visual evidence of environmental liabilities were observed during the field survey conducted on September 5, 2000. Construction and maintenance activities should not be hindered by hazardous material contamination.

#### 4.1.7 Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

This construction of the proposed RVS tower and systems will provide minimal direct short term benefits during construction. No population increases are expected to result from the implementation of this action. In addition no housing displacement is expected since the project area resides completely in an undeveloped portion of the Texas Department of Transportation and Development's ROW for Highway 375. There are, however, some indirect, beneficial impacts that would occur as a result of the operation of the RVS site. A possible reduction in illegal drug and alien traffic would have synergistic socioeconomic benefits associated with insurance costs, property losses/values, law enforcement expenses, and other social costs (i.e., drug rehabilitation, medical expenses, and labor opportunities).

The proposed action is in compliance with the intent of Executive Order 12898 that addresses Environmental Justice. This order requires Federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high or adverse human health and environmental effects of Federal programs, policies, and activities on minority or low-income populations. Implementation of the proposed action would not be expected to disproportionately affect minority and/or low-income populations. The proposed action would provide a beneficial impact to all residents (regardless of income) due to the resulting increase in the USBP's ability to more effectively perform its duties.

#### 4.2 Operation and Maintenance Effects

The RVS site and its support equipment would require only minor maintenance activities. Any such activities would be mostly limited to technology-based maintenance, and therefore, would not have any significant adverse impacts to the natural or human environment. Local transmissions (i.e., television and radio) would not be affected by the transmission signals relayed between the RVS site and the El Paso USBP station. There are, however, some indirect, beneficial impacts that would occur as a result of the operation of the RVS site. A possible reduction in illegal drug and alien traffic would have synergistic socioeconomic benefits associated with insurance costs, property losses/values, law enforcement expenses, and other social costs (i.e., drug rehabilitation, medical expenses, and labor opportunities).

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APPENDIX A PHOTOGRAPHS



Photograph 1: Proposed RVS Site facing East



Photograph 2: Proposed RVS Site facing West



Photograph 3: Proposed RVS site facing North showing residential area and wall



Photograph 4: Proposed RVS site facing South



Photograph 5: Proposed Pole site in relation to TexDOT ROW and railing.



Photograph 6: Pole to be used for Proposed RVS Site.